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ABSTRACT

In the methodology called "literature-driven integrated language arts," the words "literature-driven" describe an instructional approach that uses entire pieces of literature (short stories, novels, poems, etc.) as the stimuli for a language arts program. The aim of literature-driven instruction is to engage the affective character of the text, as opposed to instruction in which skills acquisition dominates the process. When a language arts program is referred to as "integrated," that means that writing and grammar (perhaps spelling) are treated as appropriate when student performance or student questions indicate the need for instruction in those areas. This topical bibliography and commentary reviews the literature on literature-driven integrated language arts, referred to in the literature mostly as "literature-based." The literature-based approach is not a narrowly defined methodology, but rather it encompasses a wide range of techniques and variations which all have at their core the use of literature to teach reading. Lists 3 Internet resources and 11 references. (NKA)

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Literature-Driven Integrated Language Arts

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Introduction

The following summary focuses on a methodology called *literature-driven integrated language arts*. "Literature-driven" describes an instructional approach that uses entire pieces of literature– short stories, novels, poems, etc.—as the stimuli for a language arts program. The aim of literature-driven instruction is to engage students in aesthetic reading experiences, where readers engage the affective character of the text, as opposed to instruction in which skills acquisition dominates the process. (Kong & Pearson, 2002) When a language arts program is referred to as "integrated," that means that writing and grammar (perhaps spelling) are treated as appropriate when student performance or student questions indicate the need for instruction in those areas.

Although the topic of the following summary is "literature-driven integrated language arts," there is not one instance of the use of that specific phrase in the source articles. In most cases the authors use the term "literature-*based*," which is treated in this report as a synonym for "literature-driven." Furthermore, there are very few instances in the sources in which the term "integrated" is used with a meaning that is consistent with the literacy-oriented definition above. The reason for this may be that these terms have only gained widespread usage in the educational field in years more recent than those in which the source materials were written.

It is important to note that the literature-based approach is not a narrowly-defined methodology. Rather, it encompasses a wide range of techniques and variations that all have at their core the use of literature to teach reading.

Is there evidence that a literature-based approach works?

In order to determine whether or not a literature-based approach works, one must first know what the intended outcomes are of the educators who implement it. However because of the variety in teacher strategies and techniques, there is also a variety of goals. These goals can generally be divided into two categories: (1) skills-oriented, which are conceptual and empirically assessed, and (2) literary-oriented, which are personal and subjectively assessed. Often educators have both types of goals in mind when offering literature-based instruction.

Skills-Oriented Goals

The case study presented in the article by Laura A. Phillips was the only article used for this summary that has a skills-oriented objective, "to improve the reading/vocabulary skills of an ability-grouped fifth grade class of 'low achievers' through the implementation of a literature-based whole language approach" (Phillips, 1). Incidentally, Phillips' approach was *integrated*. She explains:

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> I sought to incorporate into the curriculum a "webbing" technique which would successfully integrate children's literature with the teaching of desired skills and concepts necessary to the literacy process. (Phillips, 2)

Phillips based her experiment on previous research by Tunnell and Jacobs (1989) and by Elley (1989) that indicated that "reading stories aloud to children is a significant source of vocabulary acquisition" (Phillips, 2). During the 1989-1990 school year she read aloud to her fifth-grade class a number of Georgia Children's Book Award nominees. She then chose and presented to the students a total of 515 vocabulary words from those books over the course of eight months (Phillips, 3). They reviewed the words at a rate of fifteen per week. Finally, she assessed her "webbing" approach by comparing her students' Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores at the end of the year to their scores the previous years. Phillips comparison indicated significant statistical gains in vocabulary, reading, and spelling (Phillips, 4).

Literary-Oriented Goals

Other researchers and educators seek literary-oriented goals in the implementation of literature-based language arts programs. These goals can be divided into two main categories: 1) *literary understanding* and 2) *literary engagement*. However, because of the subjectivity involved in the implementation of strategies that seek these objectives, there is little evidence of success other than the educator or researcher's observations of the students.

The goal of *literary understanding* goes beyond a simple understanding of the conceptual content of a piece of literature in its concern for developing students reasoning and interpretation. Judith Langer argues that the goal of a literature-based language arts class is to create an environment

> "where students are encouraged to negotiate their own meanings by exploring possibilities, consider understandings from multiple perspectives, sharpen their own interpretations, and learn about features of literary style and analysis through the insights of their own responses." (Langer, 6)

Langer says that a reader-response strategy for literature-based instruction accomplishes this (Langer, 6-10).

Waggoner et al also have literary understanding as the objective of their study. They describe a discussion-based language arts instruction method called "collaborative reasoning":

> "Collaborative Reasoning...discussions offer students opportunities to expand their repertoire of responses to literature by learning to think in a reasoned manner and to explore diverse views prompted by what they read" (Waggoner, 583).

The team experimented with "collaborative reasoning" in a number of classrooms and determined not only that it worked in developing literary understanding, but that it improved the students' enthusiasm and participation as well (Waggoner, 588).

Another significant objective of literature-based language arts programs is to promote *literary engagement* among the students. Literary engagement refers to the students' motivation to read. Walker-Dalhouse, et al conducted a study on fifth- and sixth-grade middle school students to answer the following questions:

1. Will a literature-based reading program using basal themes appeal to middle school students?

2. Will such a program produce attitudinal change in the recreational and academic reading attitudes of the students? (Walker-Dalhouse, 364)

They used student feedback in reading conferences and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) by McKenna and Kear to make assessments. The team discovered that the program, in general, appealed to the students. Also, they determined with the ERAS that student attitudes improved in both recreational and academic reading (Walker-Dalhouse, 368-69).

Obstacles to the success of literature-based language arts programs

Not all literature-based programs work as well as expected. Other than poor technique or poor instruction, there are two main factors which cause problems. First, for the most part, there is agreement among researchers that a literature-based program has to incorporate both skills-oriented and literary-oriented instruction (International Reading Association, 1999; Pernai, Pulciani, & Vahle,-Heather, 2000; Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2000). The challenge is to find the appropriate balance between the two. At the conclusion of their study, for example, Walker-Dalhouse, et al discussed their plans to "make the language component less skill oriented" (Walker-Dalhouse, 369).

Another challenge to educators is that actual transition from their previous language arts program to a literature-based program. Langer points out that teachers often feel compelled to stick by their "long-lived notions of teaching" and to rely on "the lesson plans that had been a mainstay of their training" even though those plans "often worked counter to their student-based goals" (Langer, 5). Furthermore, many schools and classrooms that switch to literature-based programs have inadequate supplies of books and provide inadequate professional development training to their teachers that focuses on literature-based language arts instruction (Allington, 13-14).

Internet Resources

* The impact of a literature-based program on literacy achievement, use of literature, and attitudes of children from minority backgrounds.
The author investigated the impact of a literature-based program on the literacy achievement, use of literature, and attitudes toward reading of children from minority backgrounds.
An article from Reading Research Quarterly, 27 (3), pp 250-275. (July/August/September 1999)
http://www.reading.org/pdf/rrqarticles/Morrow92.pdf

* Literature-Based Reading Instruction - Pine Butte Elementary School
This website includes methods and techniques used in the Pine Butte Elementary School literature-based reading program. The effectiveness of these methods and techniques were supported by findings from the effective schools research as synthesized in Effective Schooling Practices: A Research Synthesis (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory).
http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/3/snap9.html

* Early Childhood and Elementary Literature-Based Instruction: Current Perspectives and Special Issues
This article reviews pertinent research about literature-based instruction and its importance in early literacy development. It is divided into three major sections: Literature-Based Instruction: A Rationale; Current Perspectives and Special Issues in Literature-Based Instruction; and Literature-Based Instruction in the Classroom.
http://www.readingonline.org/articles/handbook/gambrell/

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